

# Strategies that Succeed

## Stories from the SAGE Project

### 8. Women Speak Out in Ghana

**I**n a handful of rural coastal villages in Ghana, women and men are working together to answer the call of the

Ministry of Education's "free, Compulsory Universal Basic Education" (fCube) goals. The goals were announced by the Ministry of Education in 1992 to increase access, participation and retention in basic schools nationwide. School Management Committees (SMCs) were created to be

---

One of the objectives of SAGE Ghana at the community level was to sensitize and better focus school management committees on girls' education issues by increasing the number of women and providing these women with leadership training.

---

responsible, in conjunction with the Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), for mobilizing the communities to achieve the fCube goals. Now, as a result of training and intervention from the SAGE Ghana project,

women's voices are being included on the SMCs and PTAs to shape and influence community educational decisions.

Implemented by the Academy for Educational Development, SAGE has been working in five countries (Guinea, Mali, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and El Salvador) to develop multisectoral partnerships in support of girls' education. Since June 2001, SAGE Ghana has addressed inequities in educational access, retention, and completion for girls by implementing a three-level girls'



*Girls "map" their chores to give their community a better idea of the daily responsibilities of the girl child.*



*Celebrating the reinvigoration of SMCs and PTAs by including women.*

in many areas of the country there were very few women on the SMCs and PTAs. Since the responsibilities of the SMCs are to ensure that there is a gender balance in the schools, it was essential that these organizations themselves become more gender balanced.

education strategy in Ghana, including system, school, and community level interventions. Recent years have seen major increases in girls' educational participation in Ghana. Yet statistics illustrate that the job is not yet complete. Between 6 and 11 years of age, 84.4% of males and 81.6% of females are in school, showing a gender gap of 3%. Between ages 12 to 15, the participation rate decreases only a small percentage for males (83.8%), but much more for girls (76.8%) leaving a gender gap of 7%. This also shows that few girls transition into junior secondary school. These statistics mask regional differences in gross enrolment rates in Ghana. Generally in urban and rural

coastal areas participation is higher, but it is lower for both boys and girls in rural savanna areas.

One of the objectives of SAGE Ghana at the community level was to "sensitize and better focus the SMCs on girls' education issues by increasing the number of women on the SMCs, and by providing these women with leadership training" (Rihani and Williams 2001: 26). The SMCs are responsible for the following: a) to ensure that all children of school-going age have access to school; and b) to ensure gender balance in the enrolment and retention of pupils in school (Rihani and Williams 2001). It was clear during the design phase of the SAGE project in Ghana that

Increasing the number of women in the School Management Committees and in the PTA and training them became essential to help achieve this goal. (Rihani and Williams 2001).

To encourage female participation on the SMCs and to focus community attention on the girl-child, it became clear that subcommittees needed to be developed at the community level whose sole focus was girls' education. As a result, SAGE Ghana decided to develop girls' education subcommittees (GESCs) in their 35 target communities. Each community dedicated a day to restructuring the SMC/PTA and forming a girls' education subcommittee. Through the assistance of

SAGE Ghana, communities were given copies of a handbook developed by the USAID Ghana funded QUIPS project to orient them on the ideal structure and functions of the various SMC members, and to sensitize them on the importance of adding additional women to the SMC.

After the orientation, SAGE Ghana worked with the communities to seek 6 women and 3 men volunteers to serve on the GESC. The women and men who volunteered were introduced to the whole community and approval was sought from community members for them to serve on the newly-formed GESC. After the introduction of the approved GESC members, a short training session was held with the entire membership of the SMC/PTA on some roles and responsibilities stipulated in the SMC/PTA handbook. They also reviewed the roles and responsibilities of GESC members developed by SAGE Ghana. A cross-section of the newly appointed women volunteers, six per

*The roles and responsibilities of GESC members:*

- 1. Meeting once per month*
- 2. Ensuring that all girls are in school and stay in school*
- 3. Using community gatherings as an opportunity to sensitize parents on the importance of girls' enrolment, retention, and achievement in school*
- 4. Inviting role models to speak to girls*
- 5. Reporting periodically to the SMC/PTA executives*

community, 2 SMC, 2 PTA, 2 GESC representatives, were given training in leadership skills, guidance and counseling, and gender issues.

The targeted SAGE Ghana communities responded in a favorable way to the training. Out of the 35 communities, 28 added one or more female members (3 added four members), and only 7 communities did not yet add

a female member to their SMC. Even though SAGE has focussed basically on the SMCs, there was also an increase in the number of female members on the long-standing PTAs. Of the 35 communities, 20 communities added one or more female members to the local PTAs, which is clear evidence of the gradual influence the training led by SAGE Ghana is having on other institutions.



*Women receiving certificates for SMC/PTA/GESC training.*

## Impact

- The women members of the Girls' Education Sub-Committee, are going on house to house campaigns ensuring that all girls are enrolled in school and stay in school.
- Women's voices are heard prominently participating in the decision making process at meetings.
- Women are seen making their rounds in the evenings in pairs in the villages, making sure that girls are studying.
- Women are sensitizing parents in the importance of providing school needs for both girls and boys.
- Women teachers, doctors, nurses, ministers, social workers, presidents of nongovernmental organizations and others are invited to talk to girls on career choices and build their confidence.
- One woman is presenting herself to stand for elections as an assembly-woman.

## Conclusion

SAGE Ghana has been extremely successful at the community level with

increases in the numbers of women on SMCs and PTAs. Not only is there an increase in number; but also these voices are now being heard in the SMC and PTA. SAGE Ghana has also created a new institution at the local level which focuses entirely on girls' education, the GESC. The successes of the GESC have only begun to be felt, as these women canvas the community to ensure that girls are enrolled in school, that girls are studying, and that their parents are providing them with the things they need for school. SAGE Ghana has achieved an important success which will help meet the fCube goals to increase access, participation and retention in basic education.

## References

- Girls Education Unit. (2001). Resource Handbook for Girls' Education Officers. Accra, Ghana: Ministry of Education.
- Rihani, M. and C.H. Williams. (2001). SAGE Ghana: Design Document. Washington, D.C.: Academy for Educational Development.
- Williams, C.H. (2001). SAGE Ghana Technical Assistance Report, September 3-21, 2001. Washington, D.C.: Academy for Educational Development.
- Williams, C.H. (2001). SAGE Ghana Technical Assistance Report, November 3-21, 2001. Washington, D.C.: Academy for Educational Development.

Contributors: Dr. Beatrice Okyere, Selasie Agamah, Esenam Asempa, and Nora Kruk  
Written by Debra Schumann  
Edited by Giselle Mitton

For further information, contact  
May Rihani or Giselle Mitton  
Academy for Educational  
Development  
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20009  
[www.aed.org](http://www.aed.org)



*Academy for Educational Development*

